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PROGRAM

for the

GREAT PLAINS



Developed by
United States Department of Agriculture
with the cooperation of the
Great Plains Agricultural Council

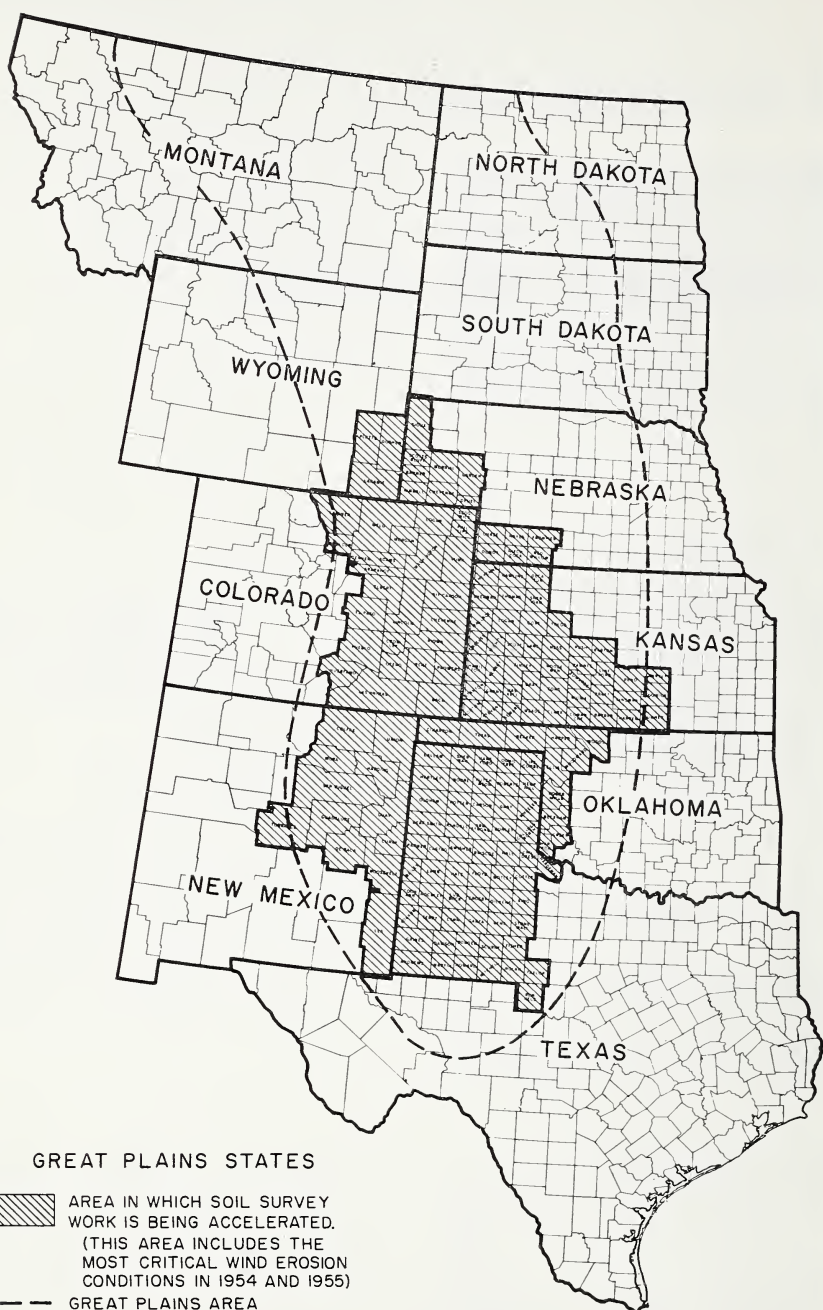


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT

The President on January 11, 1956, sent the following message to both Houses of the Congress:

THE WHITE HOUSE

DEAR MR. VICE PRESIDENT (MR. SPEAKER) :

Special problems requiring special attention have long existed throughout the Great Plains region in the central part of our country. I strongly urge the Congress to consider and act on these problems during this session.

The Great Plains region, a vast agricultural empire peopled by 17 million of our citizens, is an area of severe climatic variations which periodically produce widespread suffering and heavy economic losses. In this region farm families have a continuous struggle to protect their best cultivated and grazing lands against soil erosion during seasons of high winds and frequent periods of extremely dry weather. Some of the most critical problems of the area are the outgrowth of war when farmers and ranchers in the Great Plains States patriotically and energetically responded to their Government's call for greatly increased production to meet wartime demands by converting grasslands to cultivation.

Because these problems directly concern the lives and prosperity of millions of American citizens, the Nation as a whole is directly concerned. Because all Americans are concerned with the maintenance and improvement of our soil and water resources, every citizen in the land has an interest in the solution of agricultural difficulties in the vast Great Plains area.

The Secretary of Agriculture has submitted to me a program for meeting these problems which I herewith enclose. This program is built on 100 years of experience of farmers and ranchers, on 20 years of organized effort on the part of the Great Plains Council, and on a year of intensive Federal study under the leadership of the Secretary of Agriculture.

In part, the program is already under way. Other administrative action is now being taken. Certain legislation is needed, as the enclosed report indicates. Appropriation requests to implement the proposed program will also be presented to the Congress shortly.

Sincerely,



FOREWORD

Sustained agricultural production in the Great Plains States is vital to all the people of America. This vast region, spanning our Nation from north to south, normally produces 60 percent of our wheat and 35 percent of our cattle. The 10 Great Plains States contain 37 percent of our Nation's land area and 40 percent of our cropland. The Great Plains helped mightily to feed our people and our allies during two world wars.

The objective of the Program for the Great Plains is to assist farmers and ranchers to develop for themselves a land-use program which will help them avert many of the hazards that come with the recurring droughts common to the region.

The program focuses directly on the people of the Great Plains, the weather pattern, and the region's natural resources. It looks forward to preserving and enhancing a great productive capacity. It rests on the foundation blocks of further conservation, wise use and management of the area's soil and water resources. It recognizes that if the agriculture of the region is to be stable certain portions ought to be permanently in grasses.

To gain the far-reaching objectives of the program, local land-owners, operators, communities, counties, States, and the Federal Government must put forth a united effort. There is need for both specific and broad acceptance of responsibility, and wholehearted cooperation.

This program recognizes the pioneering land-use progress that has been made by many of the farmers and ranchers of the area. It has been developed in full cooperation with the Great Plains Council, a voluntary organization of agricultural leaders from the land-grant colleges and Federal and State agricultural agency heads in the Plains States. The Great Plains Council for many years has assembled facts and made recommendations on agricultural problems in the Plains States. The U. S. Department of Agriculture has cooperated extensively in this work. Other organizations—local, State, and National—also have made fine contributions.

I believe this program is in the national interest and that it offers a splendid opportunity for effective teamwork in aiding the people of the Great Plains States to achieve a sound and stable agriculture. This result will lend strength and stability to the entire economy.



EZRA TAFT BENSON,
Secretary.

Program for the **GREAT PLAINS**

Developed by United States Department of Agriculture with the cooperation of the Great Plains Agricultural Council

THE GREAT PLAINS

The Great Plains region is a vast, productive, agricultural empire which has problems peculiar to its environment. The region can continue to be a great productive reservoir if wisely managed to conserve and increase its productive capacity. These great potentials can be fully realized by putting into effect those practices and procedures which will more completely control the effects of weather hazards. Drought, destructive winds, floods, and other natural disasters cannot be prevented—but their damaging effects can be minimized. Based upon experience and research in the region, a sound and practical program has been developed.

The region is subject to severe climatic variations that periodically bring wide suffering and serious economic losses. Because of the character of some soils in the region, and the normal low rainfall pattern, some of the land cannot sustain continuous cultivation. When that is attempted, serious problems of wind erosion and resultant economic distress occur and recur.

The region also has the continuing problem of providing protection for its good cultivated lands against eroding soil during seasons of high winds and frequent periods of extremely dry weather. Most of the land now in cultivation is suitable for continuous cultivation provided good management practices are continuously employed. There are, however, several million acres of land now in cultivation that are not suited for such use, as is clearly indicated by the very low and uncertain yields that have been received. These are the lands that constitute the major problem.

The farmers and ranchers in the Great Plains States responded splendidly to the call of their Government for greatly increased production during World War II. The Great Plains region is suffering some of the results of continuing in effect wartime production incentives long after that emergency demand had ended.

Development of the Program

This long-range agricultural program for the Great Plains area has been developed after much research and study. A wide range of proposals was solicited and received from such sources as the following:

(a) Proposals and recommendations made at local, county, State, and regional levels by associations, agricultural colleges, and other State agencies, farm organizations, State officials, Federal agencies and officers, and other interested groups.

(b) The Great Plains Agricultural Council, from the 1930's, has given continuous study to the problem since that time and has made many carefully developed recommendations.

(c) Studies conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture and the land-grant colleges.

(d) "Guides" to a proposed long-range program for the area were drafted at a special Great Plains Agricultural Conference held May 31-June 2, 1955, with representatives of the 10 Great Plains States. These suggested "Guides" were widely distributed to interested groups and individuals and their suggestions were requested. On receipt of the reactions of farm, agricultural and other organizations, and a further conference with the Great Plains Council on July 25-27, 1955, a program for the Great Plains has been developed.

This program is applicable generally to all of the Great Plains States. Some actions, however, are being given greater initial emphasis in the most critical wind erosion areas. (See map, page ii.) Several phases of the program have already been put into effect. Other phases require further development in cooperation with leadership in the States. The program is subject to revision from time to time as additional research, continued study, and experience show need for changes and expansion.

To become effective any long-range program must be developed and adapted to local conditions by the people in the area with appropriate assistance from their local, State, and Federal Governments.

The Objective of the Program

The goal to be achieved is a more stable agriculture, more dependable sources of income, and progressively satisfactory livelihood for the people of the region. To achieve this goal, there must be widespread use of good soil management and water conservation practices



Without protective measures both soil and water are lost even on nearly level land.



Terraces save water and soil and store moisture for higher yields.

and adjustments in sizes and types of farms which will enable farmers and ranchers to effectively cope with the climatic hazards of the region.

There must also be complete understanding of the objective and coordinated teamwork on the part of all concerned, farmers, land-owners, civic and agricultural groups, private industry, local, State, and Federal agencies and governments, in order to translate this program into action to create a more stable economy and for maximum benefits to all the residents of the Great Plains.

Action Being Taken by the U. S. Department of Agriculture

The following actions have been taken or are contemplated by the U. S. Department of Agriculture to assist farm and ranch operators of the region in the solution of their problems.

1. Land Classification Intensified

The Soil Conservation Service has moved ahead its soil survey work to be able to make available, farm by farm, this basic information for the proper use and management of the land in the Great Plains. This survey work is being concentrated first on the remainder of the crop land in the critical wind erosion areas. (See map, page ii.)

This inventory of the soil will provide a basis for the land capability classification, which is a very useful tool in making adjustments for a more stable agriculture. Additional experienced personnel have been added to the present staff to complete the survey in the critical wind erosion areas of the Great Plains area as rapidly as possible.

2. Technical Assistance for Conservation Measures

The program of on-the-farm technical assistance in soil and water conservation is being accelerated by the Soil Conservation Service. Additional technicians are being provided in those districts of the Great Plains where farmers and ranchers have made requests, and where such help is necessary to accelerate other State and Federal programs.

3. Cost Sharing for Conservation

The policy of the Agricultural Conservation Program Service will be one of sharing with farmers and ranchers the cost of installing and establishing those practices which are most enduring and most needed but which are not now a part of their normal farm and ranch operations.

The ACP cost-sharing program on those practices that are intended to bring about those land use adjustments required for a long-range program will be accelerated and rates of payment made more flexible.

4. Credit for the Area

Private and cooperative lenders, historically the chief sources of agricultural credit, are being encouraged to provide maximum sound credit assistance to the majority of farmers, ranchers, and their cooperative organizations.

A review of the need for and the possibility of modifying regulations, supervisory requirements, and Federal banking laws to enable bankers to meet the problem of carrying good risks through an emergency period such as a drought disaster and making more intermediate term loans, is now in progress.

All lenders, cooperative, private, and governmental, should take into consideration, in their credit policies, proper land use and sound management practices, as well as the size and type of the operation.

All lenders will be encouraged to meet the need for intermediate and long-term credit to permit the enlargement and adaptation of farm units that are now too small or improperly organized to make the best use of resources.

5. Credit Program of Farmers Home Administration

The Farmers Home Administration has developed and placed in operation in a great many counties a credit program designed es-



Severe wind erosion resulted in the abandonment of this Colorado farm.

pecially for landowners and operators. In substance, its provisions are as follows:

(a) Loans for reseeding and the establishment of grasslands and other approved conservation and land use practices.

(b) Loans for soil and water erosion control measures.

(c) Loans for the improvement and development of domestic and irrigation water supplies, for the repair and improvement of existing farm buildings, and for the purchase of such additional land as may be necessary to enlarge a farm into a *family-type size unit*.

(d) Loans for the purchase of livestock, farm equipment, seed, fertilizer, feed for livestock, insecticides, farm supplies, and for farm equipment repairs, the payment of interest, insurance, and taxes, including the refinancing of existing debts, where necessary.

(e) Assistance to both creditors and debtors in effecting voluntary debt adjustments so that the debt load on the farmer or rancher will be held to a point within his ability to repay.

(f) Loans will be predicated on farming operations that are consistent with recommended land use and farm management practices for the area.

(g) Terms in all instances will be geared to the expected repayment ability of the borrower.

(h) Interest rate will be 3 percent on loans made under this new special loan program.

Additional field personnel have been added to the staff in the Great Plains region to assure proper attention to the making and servicing of these and other loans handled by the Farmers Home Administration. This new special loan program supplements the credit now available from private cooperative and governmental sources. Loans will be made only to farmers and ranchers who are unable to obtain necessary credit at reasonable rates and terms from other lenders.



A cover crop is the first step in restoring the abandoned land to productive use.



Numerous hummocks of top soil, 12 to 18 inches high, on a former wheat field.

6. Federal Crop Insurance Strengthened

Crop insurance is being further developed and strengthened to eventually serve as a major protective measure against crop losses in all areas suitable for arable farming. It may be necessary to extend the contract of insurance over more than one crop year in order to equalize premiums and losses. Standards of performance in carrying out risk-reducing practices will be required in the insurance contract.

Changes will be made in the contract provisions for the wind erosion counties designed to encourage insured farmers to plant cover crops early and to refrain from summer fallowing the same land more than one year when the winter wheat crop is lost early in the season.

Crop insurance will not be available on land unsuited for the long-time production of the insured crop. Crop insurance must eventually operate on a sound actuarial basis. In the interest of developing and maintaining a sound insurance program, local leaders and agencies will be encouraged to assist the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation in screening out land use and farming practices which should not be insured, and to determine if there are farming practices which should be an eligibility requirement.

Where crop insurance is available, farmers will be encouraged to join in building a sound and lasting crop insurance program to stabilize the agricultural economy of the individual and the area. All Department agencies will be instructed to encourage eligible producers to carry crop insurance.

7. Weather Reports and Research

There is great need for determining the incidence and range of weather variation and its relationship to crop yields, and the mapping of climatic patterns by major climatic and soil areas of the plains as a means of clarifying weather risk. The Weather Bureau and the Department have developed additional types of weather research

which will achieve this result. Arrangements are being made for cooperative weather projects with land-grant colleges in the region.

8. Research

In order to provide a continuing basis for intelligent action on problems facing farmers and ranchers in the Great Plains, an expanded, sustained, cooperative, and coordinated program of research will be vigorously conducted by the Agricultural Research Service in cooperation with State experiment stations. Arrangements are being made through the Great Plains Agricultural Council to inventory and summarize the results of research which are now available. Full use will be made of available research in the guidance of this program.

In the areas which are physically adapted for continuous crop production, further research will be directed toward controlling wind and water erosion and improving the soil, crop yields, livestock production, and the income expectancy, and toward the creation of cash and product reserves which are essential to carry farmers and ranchers through any drought years.

In the areas with soil which are not suitable for arable farming, intensified research will be given to guide an orderly and economically sound transition into grazing and livestock, and to prevent a recurrence of the distress caused by the cultivation of unsuitable land in high rainfall years. Research will be activated to determine methods and costs of establishing a satisfactory stand and growth of grass and the rate of stocking on regressed lands.

Farm and ranch marketing and production supply procurement problems, that will grow out of the proposed land-use adjustments, will be given consideration and study.

9. Education

With the inauguration of this program for the Great Plains there is greater need than ever for an expanded and accelerated agricultural



Grazing is the best use for damaged cultivated fields after they have become leveled and seeded.



Adequate cover protects soil from blowing.

educational program directed specifically to the solution of the recognized problems. The program must necessarily be based upon research and the actual experience of the farmers and ranchers in local areas.

The principal objectives of the expanded and accelerated program will include:

(a) Keeping farmers and ranchers completely and currently informed regarding the problems of the area and the suggested solutions thereof.

(b) Keeping the urban residents of the area informed regarding the agricultural problems of the area, and the programs for the solution thereof, in order to stimulate effective cooperation.

(c) Demonstrating the results of research for the benefit of both rural and urban residents.

The Federal Extension Service will continue to assist land-grant colleges, and their extension services, in further strengthening their educational programs by placing special emphasis on practical ways and means of making major adjustments in land use and good farm and ranch management to better assure a stable agricultural economy over a sustained period.

The expanded extension education program will help to insure definite and well-informed action by all concerned with the creation of a stable economy in the Great Plains.

10. Land Use Films Project

A series of seven teaching films will be produced on a cooperative basis between the University of Nebraska and the U. S. Department of Agriculture on wind erosion control. These will be suitable for television and accompanied by bulletins and teaching guides.

11. Acreage Allotments and Price Supports

The Commodity Stabilization Service will initiate further discussion with agricultural leaders, and conduct further studies, to determine

what features, if any, are contained in the present system of crop acreage allotments and price supports that contribute to the misuse of land and what changes, or adjustments, may be desirable.

Planting requirements to maintain "base acreage" have been relaxed from 90 percent to 75 percent of wheat acreage allotments. Other steps of this nature will be considered.

12. Adequacy of Present Authority and Funds

The sufficiency of present legislative authority and funds to make the maximum sound contribution to the solution of the problems of this region are being carefully reviewed. The Secretary will make proposals for new legislation and for such additional authority and funds as are determined necessary to accomplish the objective of this program.

Division of Responsibilities

Landowners and Operators and Local Leaders

The ownership and operation of land carries with it the primary responsibility for maintaining its productive capacity by following proper land use practices.

Landowners and operators are responsible, especially when using publicly supported programs or facilities, to so apply their benefits as to preserve and enhance the value of their land. They should also assume the responsibility for participating in, and contributing to, the formation and development of policies and programs which are adapted to the needs of their area.

Civic, farm, and business interests in the area should assume local leadership. To be successful, any program will require recognition of problems locally, and a willingness on the part of all concerned to accept their full share of the responsibility and leadership for the solution of the problem.



Damage by accumulation may come to protected fields from adjacent unprotected areas.



The Plains are capable of this—

County and State Governments

There are public obligations to be discharged by county and State officials.

County governments have the responsibility of the administration of some phases of the program, where such authority exists, such as:

- (a) Carrying out a system of land classification.
- (b) Applying tax procedures that permit and encourage proper land use.
- (c) Participating in efforts to improve land use.
- (d) Assuming leadership in the problems requiring community action.

State governments can facilitate the program by assuming the responsibility for:

- (a) The enactment of enabling legislation to meet the problems of proper land use to provide where needed:
 - 1. Rural zoning.
 - 2. Soil conservation district land-use ordinances.
 - 3. Wind erosion district regulations.
 - 4. Grazing association regulations.
 - 5. Easements and protective covenants.
 - 6. Other types of district organization authority as may be required to meet land use problems.

(b) Provide funds for research, education, regulatory, and action programs needed to assist landowners and operators in achieving recognized standards of proper land use.

(c) Give increased thought to a review of water resources project lands and to accept the additional responsibility for water resource programs affecting landowners.



—and this.

(d) The enactment of legislation providing for:

1. Assessments and taxation of land in such a way as to encourage proper land use according to the classification of land.
2. Control the use of surface and underground water.
3. Pollution abatement and establishment of procedures for their enforcement.

Only the States can enact much of the needed legislation for effective local programs.

Federal Government

The Federal Government has the responsibility for:

- (a) Cooperating with the States and local governments by providing agricultural program aids, education, technical assistance as required, coordination, and financial assistance.
- (b) Adjusting agricultural programs of direct Federal administration so as to achieve from them the greatest possible contribution to a more stable and prosperous agriculture and maintaining the land resources.

Acknowledgments

Many helpful suggestions and recommendations have been received from the National Agricultural Advisory Commission, agricultural leaders and farm organizations, State and Federal agricultural agencies, State officials, and local, county, State, and regional organizations.

